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SUBJECT: ECOWAS: 35TH SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On December 19, the ECOWAS 35th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government met in Abuja. The one-day summit capped off a week of ministerial-level discussions that primarily focused on limiting the effects of the global economic crisis on the region, encouraging infrastructure development, and improving energy generation and delivery to member states. Pronouncements were also made on the need to improve regional food security and combat the growing instability brought about by increased trafficking and domestic consumption of narcotics. Finally, in a move that surprised observers, Nigeria was given the chairmanship of the Heads of State Authority for 2009, following what is largely regarded as a productive and energetic 2008 performance by Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore. Ambassador's understanding is that Nigeria received the chairmanship by default due to issues surrounding Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. All this could act in Nigerian Foreign Minister Maduekwe's favor: having to act as defacto ECOWAS Chair for a year for an ailing President Yar'Adua is just one of the many ways he will try to secure his ministerial position, after almost being pushed out in the recent round of candidates. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On December 19, the ECOWAS 35th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government convened in Abuja for a one-day meeting to discuss pressing regional issues. Taking up the themes discussed on a ministerial level in the preceding days, the Summit ended with Heads of State calling for progress on a number of pressing regional issues, beginning with efforts to limit the effects of the global economic crisis on member states. Recent years have seen strong regional economic growth and an increase in foreign direct investment; however, ECOWAS leaders worry that the financial crisis threatens to both reduce growth and exacerbate existing problems. They concluded that the best remedy for the world's current economic woes is "improved global economic governance" and greater African participation in efforts to find solutions.

¶3. (U) Other matters addressed during the one-day summit included the region's pressing need for massive investment to improve infrastructure, the lack of food security, and the lack of reliable energy supply. Heads of State endorsed the establishment of an ECOWAS Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority to be based in Accra, and also the creation of a Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency to be located in Praia. They expressed the hope that these two

new agencies could increase electricity trading among member states, while making power supply to West African consumers more affordable and constant. Finally, a last major pronouncement addressed both the trafficking and consumption of narcotics, as a factor in the call for support for a five-year strategic plan for the West African Health Organization to improve overall regional health care (no further details were offered about the plan).

¶4. (C) In a move that many observers did not expect, the Heads of State elected Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, a one-year position that is supposed to provide leadership in facing urgent matters that arise throughout the year. While Nigeria provides an estimated 60 per cent of ECOWAS' annual budget (and in some years past nearly the entire budget when other member states had defaulted), it generally keeps a low public profile in the Commission, preferring to exert pressure behind the scenes in an attempt to avoid being seen as the regional hegemon. This move, coming on the heels of the Nigerian Supreme Court's affirmation of his seriously flawed 2007 election, is especially surprising considering the moribund leadership Yar'Adua has provided his own country in the past 18 months.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Ambassador's understanding of the behind-the-scenes activities leading up to the GON leadership is that Gambia was deemed unacceptable by Niger due to a 50 year old feud, in which Nigerians have been killed in Gambia. Others in the group had problems with Liberia's and/or Sierra Leone's leaders becoming chairman, so Nigeria ended up

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the default candidate. In addition, Foreign Minister Maduekwe is looking for ways to secure his ministerial position, as he was nearly forced out of this round of Yar'Adua's ministerial candidates. Having to act as defacto Chair of ECOWAS for a year for his ailing President is one way to do this.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: ECOWAS could perhaps best serve West Africa by looking inward: one of the ECOWAS' most glaring needs is internal reform, particularly in the areas of budgeting and execution of plans and programs. During the November 2008 Donors Meeting, it was revealed that for the past four years ECOWAS has only spent 60 per cent of the money available to it via its own budget and donor grants. With the 2008 budget reportedly being \$210 million, the unspent cash could amount to several hundred million dollars, enough to make a huge dent in any number of urgent regional needs. ECOWAS' poor budget execution is made worse by international partners' tendency to throw money at it in spasms of uncoordinated giving; the European Union alone is donating 500 million euros over the next five years, and even the Chinese bellied up to the bar on December 15 with \$100,000. Combined with what will likely be a lackluster year of leadership coming from President Yar'Adua, Post predicts that 2009 will see an ECOWAS long on communiques, conferences, and calls for more money from international donors, and short on progress in tackling the energy, infrastructure, and security issues that plague the lives of ordinary West Africans. That being said, the Nigerian Foreign Minister is savvy, appreciates the role of Nigeria in the region, and is pro-U.S. We will try to take advantage of all these things to get ECOWAS and Nigeria to do more in the region. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos. Sanders